Ken TAEUBER

This is an interview for the Don Dunstan History Project dated 19 June 2007. The interviewer is Bruce Guerin and the interviewee is Ken Taeuber.

We can start again.

Right, my name is Ken Taeuber. I am almost 84 years old. From 1939 to 1983 I served as a public servant in the South Australian Government and during that period the senior appointments I held were Commissioner of Land Tax, Commissioner for Public Service Board, Chairman of the South Australian Land Commission, Deputy Chairman of the State Government Insurance Commission and eventually Director of General Lands. From 1942 to 1945, I served on flying duties operationally with the RAAF in Europe.

That’s a very wide spread of activities.

And as a member of the National Housing Cost Inquiry in 1977-1978.

Now, you came up towards the senior ranks in Playford’s time?

Yes, I was appointed the head of a very small department as Commissioner of Land Tax by Tom Playford in 1962 and I recall a personal vignette in that episode. I was in my 30s which was relatively young for a senior public servant in that era. Tom called me up to his office and congratulated me, wished me well in the future and said to me “I never want to see you again unless you get into trouble” which was the delightful little vignette of the Playford era.

Exactly. And what was the date then?

1962.

What was it like going through the change politically and in public service to have a strong Playford onto the first Dunstan Government or Walsh Government to be governing?

Well, my personal observation would be that most senior public servants of the Playford era were fairly comfortable with the circumstances. The change in Government meant that they had to accommodate themselves to a new era and I recall having a visit from one of them one Sunday morning at my home, to say that he had worked very well with Tom Playford and understood Tom’s temperament and modus operandi and he was having difficulty in deciding how he would come to terms with Frank Walsh the incoming Premier; could I give him that advice? I was no wiser than he was on that issue. I think that we all had to accept that there was a new regime, not that Frank Walsh did a great deal as Premier. He was fairly quickly succeeded by Donald Dunstan who had competed for the Deputy leadership of the Labour Party with Des Corcoran and Dunstan won that position by a narrow margin. Therefore, when Frank Walsh decided to retire prematurely Don became Premier.
Ken TAEUBER

So in the pre-Walsh period there was a far amount of contact between the senior public servants?

Yes, there had to be because there was very little by way of ministerial direction. The Playford Government had been fairly happy with that arrangement as I understood it and did not rock the boat.

So, does that mean that there wasn’t much change or change was managed in a different way?

Very little change. The nationalisation of the electricity industry by Playford was the major change that I recall arising out of his regime during my time.

There was some preparation for change in the form of getting Stuart Hart to do a planning report ---

Yes. That was inspired to a great degree by a series of articles in The Advertiser which highlighted the fact that there was rapid urban growth in metropolitan Adelaide, but little of it controlled in a comprehensive way. Therefore, there was a lot of pressure to establish some sort of planning regime that would bring a degree of orderliness into the then rapid growth. It was decided to enact the Planning Act which set up a Director of Planning and as you said Stuart Hart was appointed to that post.

What was the role of the opposition in people like Dunstan in his run up to their Government ---

Control of that sort? Oh they supported it because I think it was in accordance with their idea of the way urban growth should be planned to occur.

Were they a significant force for getting change or ---?

Not that I am aware of. I think they supported the public pressure that was developing towards creating some sort of control over the direction of urban growth.

So what happened in the early days of Dunstan’s time as Premier?

Well I suppose the major change was the initiation of reform to the electoral system. I personally in the Playford era felt resentful of the fact that people who voted in say Burra had a vote worth three times as much as mine. Electoral reform was high on the agenda although I must say that the implementation of electoral reform was accomplished eventually mainly through Steele Hall. He played a major part in the eventual total reform of the electoral system which changed the role of the legislative council and attempted to institute a philosophy of one vote one value.

What happened to your role in Dunstan’s first Government?

Well, amongst other things there was a new Public Service Act with substantial amendments. A new full time Public Service Board comprised of the former Public Service Commissioner Max Dennis as Chairman, Bob Bakewell (who had been operating as Chief Recruiting and Training Officer), and I were appointed as the other
two full time members of the Board. Our appointments were formally gazetted the day before Dunstan went out of office. The new Board, a creature of the Labor Government, was then in a situation where there was a Liberal government in power. I thought Steele Hall, the next Premier, realised the Board had a function to carry out and let it do it.

An interesting situation for a career public servant to find himself in?

Yes, very interesting situation because there was a tendency to regard you as a political appointee. That might have been some extent true about Bob Bakewell but certainly not about me.

So what was the origin of that set of amendments to the Public Service Act?

I think it was largely brought about by pressure from the Public Service Association that felt that the single Commissioner function did not adequately allow wider public service participation in the management of the public service.

And within the Public Service Association any particular people who were ---

Graham Inns was particularly active. He was Assistant General Secretary of the Association at that time and he had the ear of the Premier because they were all Norwood people, if I can put it in those terms. I understand although I had no direct reason to believe that Graham was very close to Don Dunstan.

And he remained in the Public Service Association until ---

He applied for and was appointed as an industrial relations officer in the Papua New Guinea Government, which was a public service position in that Government. When Bakewell was made Head of the Premier’s Department under the Dunstan regime, Graham Inns was appointed the third member of the Public Service Board.

Okay, in the job under Steele-Hall as a very new Commissioner of the Public Service Board, what did you see as the major things that had to be accomplished?

There had to be proper implementation of the Public Service Act in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness and to rid the Public Service of the curse of seniority.

That was expected as the basis for promotion was it?

Yes, it was a telling factor. Under the previous regime, seniority gave an automatic right to appeal against appointments.

Was this repressing good talent lower down or was it just part of a fairly closed system?

Well it’s hard to say because I wasn’t very senior when I was appointed Commissioner of Land Tax so with my personal experience it showed that seniority didn’t matter so much but it was important. You could often hear the word seniority used and gradually its use disappeared.
Ken TAEUBER

Yeah. What was your role personally in this period?

Well I was Commissioner of Land Tax from 1962 to 1968 when I was appointed a full time member of the Public Service Board and we decided that the functions the Public Service Board would be better dealt with if they were shared between the two new members of the Board with the Chairman exercising a wider role. Bob Bakewell got the personnel function and I got the industrial relations function and the efficiency function. My prime responsibility was industrial relations.

And on the efficiency side, was there something where you developed the agenda

Well I tried to as best I could because there were lots of obstacles sometimes caused by department heads, who didn’t like any intrusion into their function. On the industrial relations side there was a great deal of sensitivity. I recall the Chief Industrial Officer coming to me one day and saying look we have got this claim and it’s a load of nonsense, they are only worth this much whereas they are claiming that much. I said you have got to go through the ritual, which is the process of negotiation knowing that the answer was going to come somewhere down the middle but I said if you go to the middle first you deny the chance of the haggling that must go on.

Process is important

Yes that’s right.

But on the efficiency side as I recall the Board had powers which were, well would be described as intrusive by recipients ---

Yes.

And in these confrontations that you had, were you given political backing or was the Board just something that operated over ---

The Board was largely left to manage the public service. There was very little intrusion but occasionally in the case of appointments some preference might be expressed politically for particular employees with I hope little effect. On the efficiency side for example there was a pressure to introduce some sort of work measurement into the public service to judge performance and we employed consultants who were experts in that area to set up appropriate arrangements. That was resented very much by departments. I particularly remember we decided to try it out first of all the Lands Titles Office and, because they were the most conservative group of people in the public service and there was tremendous resistance. But we instituted the system to a limited degree.

That would have been one of the earlier uses of consultancy in that form of function?

It was, yes. We didn’t make a great deal of the use of consultants but in that issue we did because we had no public service experience to employ and it is better to get an outside view on what had to be done rather than try to do it ourselves from scratch.
Ken TAEUBER

Was there a feeling in the Board, to members themselves and their organisation, that progress was made significantly over the Hall Government period?

Yes I think so. We did try to administer the Act in accordance with the spirit in which it had been enacted and all sorts of catchy phrases came to light and management by objectives was one. I remember I had a private trip to the UK during that period and went to see the Civil Service Authorities in London to discuss matters of mutual interest. I mentioned MBO, Management by Objective, as the new catchphrase and I will never forget the response from the bloke I was talking to. He said “Do you know what it means?” and I said “No” and he said “more bloody officers”.

Then there was quite a vigorous election campaign and Dunstan came into power. What difference did that make?

Well, he carried forward the final amendments to the Public Service Act that had been within the pipeline, he immediately set about amending the Licensing Act which was much looked for. I think he carried through to finality the reform to the electoral system. The gerrymander went fairly quickly. He appointed Bob Bakewell Head of the Premier’s Department which was a major move. The Premier’s Department had been run by John White who was a secretarial type person. I think that was a major step forward because it suddenly made the Premier’s Department more a focus of government rather than a servant of government.

Was it a surprise that Bob Bakewell was appointed to that job?

No, no, everybody has networks. I think Bob had a network and I think it was generally known that he was due for something like that, which he got. There was some resentment amongst a lot of the other senior public servants at the time. One in particular said to me one day “Oh that bloke, I call him Wobbly Bob”. It was a characterisation.

That’s interesting because having turned up in the public service later than that I gained the impression that Des Corcoran had coined this phrase ---

Well, it was a well known phrase. I think it might have been coined by Bill Isbel who was head of a smaller department at the time, Chief Secretary’s Department. He was fairly close to Des because I think they had common military experience or something like that so they both used that term.

Well, there were changes across a wide range of activities over that period of the Dunstan Government. In the public service area, focusing on the broad departmental activity to begin with, what changes were there? Were they ones inspired by Dunstan or ones that you had put forward and he supported or you just did them?

We just did them I think was the best way to describe them.

In this period did you feel that you had more of an open go or you were channelled in a particular direction in doing these things?
No. We just did what had to be done and concentrated on managing the public service.

So were your priorities any different from what they had been say 5 years before either because of what you had achieved or changed in time?

Well not really because, I was on the Public Service Board for 5 years from 1968 to 1973 and during that time we had a change in membership with Graham Inns taking Bob Bakewell’s place and it was fairly obvious to me that I needed to be doing something beyond being a member of the Public Service Board. It had become rather tedious. One of the programs that Dunstan picked up quickly following the election of the Whitlam Government and Tom Uren as Minister for Urban and Regional Development was the decision by that government to take a direct hand in managing urban development around Australia with the new cities programs, land commission type programs and so on. Don Dunstan decided to form the Land Commission for South Australia and I was invited to become the first full time Chairman of that Commission. I was relieved to be free of what I regarded as the tedium of the Public Service Board and to get on to something that was fresh and exciting and something that I had some specialised knowledge about because of my background in land matters previously. And it was exciting to be involved in a program that for example required the Land Commission to spend $8 million in about 6 months buying land. Fortunately I had been a member of a small group including Andrew Wells who had recommended amendments to the Land Acquisition Act to simplify the process and we were able to use those new provisions to carry out the combined program for the State and Commonwealth in urban matters.

So Andrew Wells was doing this in what capacity?

He was Solicitor-General at the time. He and I and one other person whose name I can’t remember, were asked to review the Lands Acquisition Act which we did and that became a model for the rest of Australia.

There was an exercise also in, well leading up to the formation of the Land Commission, were you involved in that?

Yes very much so. There was a chap involved much to very little end called Ken Tomkinson, a name that might ring a bell with you.

Yes.

And to my dismay, when they appointed the Land Commissioner of South Australia, and I was made Chairman, Pat Troy who was one of Tom Uren’s principal advisers in urban matters and now Professor of something or other at ANU, was the Commonwealth nominee and Ken Tomkinson became the State nominee. Now he, Ken Tomkinson was very much in that Norwood clique, if I can put it that way, being Mayor of St Peters and so on. I had known him for many years as a land agent. To my horror he was appointed a member of the Land Commission and he and Pat Troy were like oil and water. Things developed through some of the things that Ken Tomkinson did outside of the area of the Commission relating to it that I found embarrassing and frustrating to the extent that I went to Frank Kneebone who was the
Ken TAEUBER

Minister responsible at that time, and said to him either he goes or I go and as a result of that they replaced Ken Tomkinson with Alec Ramsay and he and Pat Troy were more compatible and more intelligent.

What sort of things was Tomkinson doing

Well, he was acting independently, he would try to do things to influence the direction of the Land Commission that weren’t decided by the Commission as a group. I am not sure what his objective was but him just to display his power.

So it was just individual agendas or ---

Yes, individual agendas. I always tried to put a staff together with people who had some knowledge in what the Land Commission was all about and he was coming along presenting me with the names of people that should be appointed to these jobs without going through some sort of process of assessing them.

And did he resist vigorously your resistance?

No, I think he accepted that I was the Chairman after all and I let him know that in no mean terms I might say.

Alec Ramsay was appointed, was that on your recommendation?

No, that was a decision of the Premier.

But earlier on you said Ramsay had had a problem with Dunstan’s style,

Well I am not sure of that. I think Alec had been so comfortable operating as General Manager of the South Australian Housing Trust. He did a remarkable job accommodating the very large increase in the population, that had occurred with the migration programs at the time, that he felt that he may not be able to do such a good job if he was inhibited by implementing particular policies that didn’t fit.

So, by that time he had worked out a way of living with Dunstan?

Oh yes.

Or was it a much more positive thing ---

He did and in fact I found Alec a very positive, a highly intelligent man who had a background on housing people in difficult circumstances and I think he got a lot of support. I am not sure that he was ever completely comfortable with Don Dunstan because they came from different backgrounds and I think they had different personal values and so on.

I know that some people, Ramsay included, pointed out that he probably invented land banking back in the 30s through the Housing Trust ---
Well, he did. In fact one of the earliest things that we did in the Land Commission was to take over that land bank from the Housing Trust. It had the interesting effect that because it was Commonwealth money that we were using to buy this land, and it was all brought on the basis of a bona fide valuation by the Land Board, we were able to transfer those Commonwealth funds to the public housing programs in South Australia and we became the land banker. We acquired the Housing Trust land bank, augmented it by substantial land acquisitions in areas that were going to be needed for urban expansion in Adelaide and so we had a handsome land bank as a result of that.

So did Ramsay find his role or view his role on the Land Commission as a natural extension of what he was doing in the Housing Trust or a way of accommodating to changes he may have preferred not to happen?

No, I think he, that despite their dissimilar background he was quite compatible with Pat Troy. I must say it was intellectually demanding to Chair a meeting with those two on the Board because they were both intellectually well equipped, Pat Troy particularly and Alec operated not as General Manager of the Housing Trust but he operated as a member of the Land Commission.

Gilbert Seaman had a continuing role or seemed to have a role in the housing related land issues?

Yes I think so but I must say that Gilbert Seaman and Alec Ramsay were incompatible in many ways. I think it arose from the fact that they both had similar backgrounds. They both had done an economics degree at Adelaide University, they both had been associated as teachers at one stage and they both moved into these two spheres of Government and I think they had a high degree of personal incompatibility.

In this area, the Land Commission was a very significant thing as far as Dunstan’s government was concerned and nationally it was very high profile, were you able as a Land Commission to craft your own approach to this or was it a matter of running along the rails that had been laid down by other people either in Canberra or South Australia?

No because under the agreement between the Commonwealth and the State, the Land Commission was required to develop a program of acquisition of land and a program of development of land that had to be agreed to by the Commonwealth so the Land Commission’s modus operandi was to identify land that would be needed for expansion, having been identified in the Metropolitan Development Plan and I will just digress there for a moment and say that in determining our priorities for the acquisition of land other than the land bank we took over from the Housing Trust I decided that we would concentrate on those areas which showed the greatest potential for early development. I thought who better to advise me on what they were than the Director of Planning. So I went to Stuart Hart and I said look Stuart I would like your advice. I would like you to advise me on where you think it would be best to acquire land and develop it in the interests of the development of metropolitan Adelaide. I will never forget it; there was a huge map of the metropolitan development plan hanging on the wall and Stuart pointed at it and he said anywhere in that green area, which was the whole area that had been identified for urban development which didn’t
help very much. We then decided our own priorities which included the north eastern metropolitan area, the Tea Tree Gully area because we could see the pressure that the rate of development was somewhat faster there than elsewhere. We concentrated on acquiring as much of the area there bearing in mind that our powers under the Land Commission Act were limited in terms of what we could acquire; we couldn’t acquire any land that had somebody’s principal place of residence on it, so there were some limitations. We acquired under that particular priority the land that eventually became Golden Grove and we also acquired in the south, south of Port Noarlunga, areas there that showed early need for development and that became Seaford. The program had to be developed by us, approved by the State Government, submitted to the Commonwealth and approved by the Commonwealth. While this was going on a lot of the land that we compulsorily acquired was occupied by metropolitan vineyards. Don Dunstan had implemented a program to save the metropolitan vineyards. He rang me one day and he said I have developed this program for saving the metropolitan vineyards but you are acquiring them for future urban development. I said, well they are now owned publicly rather than by the individual viticulturists who were busily cutting them up and selling them anyway. I said if you want to keep them in public ownership as vineyards, feel free to do so. We’ve got to persuade the Commonwealth that that’s the best use for these areas but I said its better they are in public ownership now than freely developed under the present urban development process because they, the viticulturists were clearing their vines and flogging off the land.

Was he satisfied with that answer?

Yeah, he realised the validity of that statement. I said the land is now in public ownership, you can preserve it better than you can than when it is in private ownership if you wish to.

Did that get followed up ---

Nothing happened, no.

Nothing happened. I was wondering whether there might have been another request after that, that maybe you would like to buy these vineyards as well?

[laughter]. No, no, well of course again it comes back to the fact that the program both land acquisition and development had to be approved by the Commonwealth. I think they regarded the South Australian Land Commission as being partly owned by them and they regarded it as the jewel in their crown that we were able to get off the ground so quickly.

Well that was one way in which, well I say South Australia benefited from Commonwealth initiatives but on the other hand it actually provided a making ____ of Commonwealth policy ____

Yes, well, there was a compatibility between the programs and Don Dunstan’s own preference for rational development in metropolitan Adelaide.
Yes. Now in parallel with some of these things and coming from the last days of the Whitlam Government I think it was, was the Monarto exercise.

Well, yes. It was obvious that Monarto was not going to proceed. I had been appointed Director General of Lands when the final decision was made that something else could be done with all that land they acquired with Commonwealth money at Monarto. The Department of Lands became liquidator of the Monarto development lands. Fortunately the Government was far sighted enough to accept that all the land, where the vegetation had been retained and where there had been revegetation occur in fairly large planting programs that the Monarto land should be retained and not made available for private use. All the other land should be offered first to the owners from which it had been acquired at prices that were determined by the land Board, which was the valuing authority at that time. We proceeded to liquidate the land holdings of the Monarto Development Commission.

Can I go back to the beginning of that though, I guess you were in the Public Service Board when the Monarto initiative started?

Well the Monarto Development Commission was started at about the same time as the Land Commission program so the Land Commission was part of the urban programs and the Monarto Development Commission was another part of those programs, both supported by the Commonwealth.

To some extent, the role of the Monarto Development Commission as it became was in competition with the planning of metropolitan Adelaide?

Yes it was but the massive infrastructure investment that would be needed to get Monarto development going was beyond the financial capacity of the State and the Commonwealth certainly was never going to pay for it. The Monarto plan was part of the new cities program of the Commonwealth which included Orange, Albury, Wodonga and so and there was some reality in those areas but Monarto development was considered to be somewhat way out.

And you were aware of how that idea was put forward from South Australia?

I think it was put forward as being appropriate part of the new suite of urban policies of the Commonwealth Government. Tom Uren was pretty hot on those policies. I’ll never forget in the opening of the first Land Commission development at Happy Valley. We were graced by the presence of Gough Whitlam and Tom Uren to the first Land Commission development in Australia. Tom was cock a hoop and so we arranged for a trip to show him around all the other land holdings that we’d amassed and in the course of preparing the agenda for this opening I had a ring from a group of woman at Hallett Cove who wanted to get the ear of Tom on the preservation of the glacier remains at Hallett Cove. They wanted to mount a demonstration at the opening of this development. I said well, hold on, wait a minute, I will try and arrange for you to see Mr Uren some other way so I rang Tom’s office and explained the situation. I said look we are going to take Tom on a tour of the landholdings in the south that we have acquired under the Land Commission program, do you think he would like to meet this group who were interested in this bit of environmental conservation. Oh I
am sure he would, yeah. So we arranged for this group of women to congregate at the trig point at the top of O’Halloran Hill at a certain time and for Tom’s ministerial car to be there at the same time. I explained the situation to him on the bus when we were going around on the land, and we handed him over. He was quite happy to listen to what they had to say and in the end of course they did preserve the glacier remains at Hallett Cove and the Land Commission’s first development was opened without a demonstration.

The role of a public servant.

Yeah.

In the proposal being put forward, and I suppose in getting decisions made, was the Monarto Development Commission impinging on Land Commission strategies or they just operate ---

No, I think we operated independently. I judge that the enthusiasm in the Department of Urban and Regional Development, the Commonwealth Department for Land Commission programs, was somewhat stronger than it was for a new city in South Australia. They looked at that as being purely a Dunstan idea that didn’t have a great deal of validity in it so I think we got more support for our Land Commission programs than the Monarto Development Commission programs.

So, when you were talking before about where you should acquire land, you mentioned Stuart Hart in planning, what about pipes and wires organisations?

Well, that’s right because just to round that off. Having been told by Stuart Hart to proceed to acquire land anywhere in that green area as I said earlier, I went to see the engineer for sewerage and asked him where the best use of his infrastructure and potential infrastructure should we proceed to ensure that we not only acquired the land but got quickly into development of it. He was far more helpful in explaining where the greatest value would be in the use of existing infrastructure and where the best sort of further infrastructure investment could be made.

So the Engineering and Water Supply Department continued to plan Adelaide?

Very much so. Well, you know the Hills Face Zone, the line that the Hills face on, the boundary of the Hills Face Zone was determined because that was the limit to which sewerage could be economically supplied. It had nothing to do with aesthetics or habitat or anything like that. It was all to do with where you get rid of the waste water.

Which explains some of the otherwise unexplainable parts of O’Halloran Hill and ---

Oh that’s right, yes, yes. It was very much a line drawn by the then engineer for sewerage.

So who is the person that you were consulting then?
Oh I can’t think of what his name was but eventually he became Director General of Lands.

Yes. **What about transport people, roads, whatever, highways, were they significant in the ---**

Yes, one of the things that we did was to establish liaison officers within those departments so that when we were contemplating development under the Land Commission regime we obtained the best advice we could from E&WS, Highways, Public Transport. And Environment

**What was the ---**

Our objective was to make the best use of the potential of the infrastructure that was available and the most economical way of extending that infrastructure.

**What was the general attitude of these different agencies, they were somewhat separate kingdoms but were they, ---**

They were fairly co-operative. I think that they realised that in the demand for the extension of their services that arose from private development was somewhat haphazard. You could have a private development occurring there, then a big area of vacant land and then another private development occurring there which put considerable pressure on their ability to supply the necessary services. I am sure they saw a Land Commission type development program as being beneficial for them.

Over this period, Alec Ramsay had developed his own approach in Housing Trust developments of getting at least, I suppose it’s dealing with the same process, but really the entry of some of these shopping centres, schools and land for churches etc, getting football teams going and so forth, during this period of the 70s that had become, from whatever source, a more thorough going approach to integrating provision of social services and so forth. **How did the Land Commission get involved in that sort of thing?**

We had both physical and community development plans. We tried to make the best use of what services were available and to create the least possible expensive way of putting demand on extra services. Just to go back to the Ramsay era and the Playford era, I attended the ceremony when Tom Playford named this huge area of dusty land, Elizabeth. A few months later, I was given the land valuation responsibility for the area. I was rung by Alec Ramsay and he said we are going to establish a city centre for Elizabeth, he said I would like you to give me some idea of how much the land will be worth in the centre of a new city at Elizabeth, which was a very interesting question.

**A valuation question?**

Yes. So I quickly rang around Australia to find out from some of my colleagues interstate what level of comparable values they had been able to identify. But Alec was farsighted to see that Elizabeth would need a centre and he was responsible substantially for getting that centre off the ground.
Another significant urban development that got going over that period was West Lakes.

Yes, I had very little to do with West Lakes. As Commissioner of Land Tax and Chief Valuer, I was responsible for valuing all of the land that the then Harbours Board was acquiring on the Fleurieu Peninsula and an area as far south as Grange which included what is now West Lakes and North Haven and so I had a great deal of knowledge of what it had been like, I spent many hours tramping around the swamps what is now West Lakes trying to work out how much it was worth and so I got involved but not involved in anyway on the process for eventually deciding how the area would be developed.

So the Harbours Board was acquiring land around for the West Lakes Development or –

No, no, there was a very far sighted engineer employed by the Harbours Board Department as it was, in the immediate post war years. He was their planning engineer and he developed a plan for the development of Greater Port Adelaide area which covered the area from Outer Harbour down as far south as Grange and inland to the east as far as Wingfield and he got the support of the Harbours Board to proceed to acquire as much of that land as it could acquire and funded by the Government. Again Playford supported that program. He believed it was in the best long term economic interest of South Australia to have it. As a result of that, the Harbours Board had a very large land bank, part of which became West Lakes and part of which became North Haven. A lot of the land that is now being developed in the Old Port Adelaide area was acquired during that period and so there was another land bank there, the localised land bank.

The West Lakes Development involved Government and a private sector organisation playing a joint role in development. When you came to develop Golden Grove that model had not necessarily set a benchmark but it had established some working relationships, how influential was it all? Or could you start, ---

Well the Indenture Act for West Lakes became, in part, a model for Golden Grove. A similar enabling statute was enacted there that set up the management arrangements with the development of Golden Grove, to establish the Management Committee or Board and so on so the experience at West Lakes was very much used in the Golden Grove development. I wasn’t involved in the early stages of negotiations for the development of Golden Grove. The then Urban Land Trust, which was the successor to the Land Commission, called for expressions of interests in participating in a development out there because of the pressures that were emerging from demand and they eventually negotiated and agreed an arrangement with the Delfin Property Group which was the successor of the developer at West Lakes. That excited considerable doubts about the validity of the arrangement because again it had been negotiated by the Government under Dunstan. There were background suggestions that it was part of this network system that Don had had with people who had been involved in West Lakes, like Max Leiberman and people associated with him who were the main principals of the Development Finance Corporation which was involved in the West Lakes Development. Because the Golden Grove arrangements had been negotiated
between the Urban Land Trust and the Delfin Property Group under a Liberal Government, when the Labor Government came into power there was considerable doubt about the validity of that arrangement unless it were looked at so Don Hopgood, who was the responsible Minister at the time, appointed a group to review those arrangements and that was that group that consisted of Ted Phipps, who was the head of the Department of Environment and Planning, Michael Bowering who was a senior solicitor in the Crown Solicitor’s Department and me, as a retired public servant and we were asked to enquire into and report on the validity of the proposed arrangements of the development for Golden Grove, which we did, and we suggested certain changes to the arrangements that had been agreed between the parties and recommended those changes to the Government. There was considerable opposition to the arrangement with a lot of it emanating from Paul Edwards who was then General Manager of the Housing Trust who thought that the Housing Trust should carry out the development of Golden Grove. I had the task of pointing out to the Minister, in the report I gave, as to why there was no validity in that proposal. We didn’t want another Elizabeth at Golden Grove and in any event the Housing Trust was so resource strapped that the thought of getting involved on that magnitude was out of this world. The long shot of that was that the Government accepted the changes that Ted Phipps, Michael Bowering and I recommended to the Golden Grove arrangements. In due course the arrangements became the subject of a Committee of Inquiry in Parliament and it went through the process of that Committee and eventually it was enshrined in the Golden Grove Development Act. It did have a pretty tumultuous beginning.

So, when did that review take place?

The first sod was turned at Golden Grove in about 1985 and that review that we undertook would have been the early 80s.

So, yes okay. Can we revert for a little while to some of the public service management things. After you left the Board I think there was a review that was put in place headed by David Corbett,

Yes, one of the many reviews of public service. One of which you and I participated in.

That’s right. I think there is a 10 year [laughter].

Yeah.

Do you know what was, were you involved in the move towards getting that inquiry?

No, no.

So what was your perception on it?

Just another inquiry into the matters of the public service.

But no particular ---
Ken TAEUBER

I don’t think anything earth shattering came out of it. David Corbett eventually became a member of the Public Service Board.

And that was an earth shattering event [laughter]. But in terms of antecedence you didn’t see that the time was right for any particular pressures that needed to be dealt with at all by the Labor rationale by then?

No, I was, my interests were in other areas at that time.

Yeah, so ---

I think I was quite happy with the way the public service was operating,

Well, in that time there were some changes to the way senior people were employed, there were changes in the numbers of departments, and people shifting from one chair to another, did it make much difference to the way the public service ran?

I can’t say with any certainties, bear in mind that during that period amongst other things I had been appointed Deputy Chairman of the newly constituted State Government Insurance Commission and the Appointed Chairman, Lance Milne, was Agent General in London and therefore the responsibility of getting that new organisation off the ground largely fell on my shoulders and so I was pre-occupied with that and I was also involved with the Land Commission still and so I had other things to think about.

Well with the SGIC that seemed to have a somewhat similar path prepared for it as the Land Commission except in a State context for example, Dunstan had a working party or a committee of investigation and there were recommendations and decisions and then action taken to set it up. What was your perspective on that?

Well the impression I had was that every other State had a State Government Insurance Office except South Australia and I thought, I think that Don Dunstan thought that South Australia was losing something not having such a government owned organisation, I think there was a lot of validity in that in terms of the insurance services for the people of South Australia. General insurance services were provided mainly by international owned companies, and he believed that they needed something close to the people in terms of the provision of those services. Probably more importantly than that the premium income that was being generated by general insurance was largely flowing interstate or overseas and it would have been much better employed in South Australia. There were two main objectives that the Government had. One was to enhance general insurance services to the community of South Australia and the other was to use the pool of accumulated premiums in the interests of investment and worthwhile projects in South Australia. I thought they were two good objectives and that is what we thought about in setting up the Commission. It subsequently became changed after I left by the then Chairman and the then General Manager. The original General Manager, Peter Gillam was an insurance man through and through and knew the ins and outs of the industry. He had an interest in South Australia because his origins were in South Australia, and he was a damn good General Manager. But subsequently, the new Chairman and new
General Manager, decided that they could use the accumulated premium reserve more beneficially to the Commission by going outside of South Australia and they embarked on some fairly hazardous investments that eventually broke the State Government Insurance. It says something about another State organisation that I remember vividly.

So how did it go off the rails then?

Well I think they just invested in judiciously outside of South Australia and they got away from those two objectives in that the way I understand Don Dunstan perceived them and the way I perceived them. The SGIC’s two objectives should have been to provide a local general insurance service to the people of South Australia and to use the accumulated funds that do accrue and accumulate in the insurance industry for the benefit of South Australia by investing it in South Australia and I think they got off the rails on that second count.

And they did express ambitions of becoming a financial institution?

Oh yes, well look, looking at the other financial organisation in South Australia. In retirement, I have had several trips to Europe and I remember calling the Agent General’s office in London at the time the fiasco of the State Bank was blowing up and I can’t think who the Agent General was at the time but he said do you know that bloke used to come in and swan around as if he was running the Bank of England and I think a bit of that also happened with the State Government Insurance Commission; a similar sort of philosophy.

Yes, well you had a succession of key appointments within the State sphere and contributed outside of your strict discipline on a number of occasions because of successive governments asking you to do things, do you feel that there was anything particular about the Dunstan period, either Dunstan himself or whatever, that had changed the nature of the public service machine if you can it a machine over that period? Was there anything distinctive in it or was it really just like any other State Government going through changes?

Well, no I think it was greater opportunity for people like yourself to participate in public service. You know, to come in and to serve in a public service capacity without having a career in public service. I think the quality of the service was enhanced by widening those sort of opportunities more so than they would have been in the pre-Dunstan era.

Well, during that time there were some appointments that were significant either because people were challenged on them or because of the particular contribution of the people, for example, there was McPhail in local government, heading a small office but involved in planning and so forth, and different people became heads of departments.

Well I used to call those people, two of whose names you have mentioned, “refugees from DURD” because when the change of government occurred in Canberra following the dismissal of Whitlam, most of these DURD people were lost and some
of them had come to South Australia and they stayed here and became South Australian public servants.

So was that a mantra of South Australia maintaining the faith or becoming the last refuge for displaced persons or ---

Well I think because there was still a Labor Government in South Australia because some of its values inspired the DURD creation these people were treated better then they might otherwise have been in terms of preference of appointment and so on.

And if you ---

There was one gem in that group, I mean Ted Phipps was one of the blokes in that group but Ted was a different ilk to some of the others.

Yes, yes, quite a number.

Oh there were.

Not all in one batch necessarily but over a period ---

Well the fellow who became Chairman of the Public Service Board, oh,

David _____---

Andrew Strickland.

Oh Strickland.

He was another one but Andrew was again a different ilk to some of them ---

Yeah. Then going on from the Dunstan period, the Tonkin Government, did make, well certainly bought in different emphases, did it make much different to the way the public service operated? Or the things that government did?

Not really. There were some changes, I was head of the Lands Department at that time, I guess I have two major memories of the Tonkin Government. We had established a business in the Department of Lands called Mapland which was to make it easier for people to get the services of the mapping function. We opened a shop in the city just for that purpose and Tonkin didn’t like that and he was persistently ringing up and asking when we were going to get rid of Mapland and sell it off. It was that sort of incident. Peter Arnold was Minister of Lands under the Tonkin Government. I always just called him the Minister for the Riverland because he came from Cadell and anything that concerned the pastoral area of the State that we were administering and the Eyre Peninsula or whatever, he wasn’t very interested in it but he was if it affected the Riverland so it was a very interesting period.

What about planning, urban planning?

No I don’t think that there was any thing remarkable that happened in that era.
Ken TAEUBER

Just continuing on ---

Yes.

Well then after that period Bannon came into power and he started off with some urban
development along North Terrace, a particularly major project, but also in many ways
was proclaiming that he was carrying on what had been done during the 70s in
Government involving public housing as part of the economic development and so forth.
Was it really a continuation or was it a change of direction that happened over that
period?

Well, I had retired at that time and I didn’t perceive any remarkable change. I think
Bannon became very quickly pre-occupied by the State Bank issue.

Took a bit of time though ---

Yes,

8 years as ---

No I guess my job at that time was Golden Grove and we were concentrating on that
and that lasted for 20 years almost but that was my major interest and anything else
was just peripheral.

So was that project angled to operate to best effect?

I think so. It was an interesting arrangement because the Joint Venture Agreement
between the parties provided that there be a management committee with 3 members
appointed by Delfin and 3 members appointed by the Urban Land Trust or its
successor. I was the Chairman who was independent and who got no vote unless they
deadlocked. In the 20 years I never voted and I think that says more about the
qualities of the people who had been appointed to that management committee than it
does about me. It was not uncommon to find the Government representatives being
more concerned about the commercial functions of the development or Delfin more
concerned about the public interest functions than the other party. It was that sort of
atmosphere.

Who were the people who were appointed over that period?

Brian Martin was a Delfin appointee; he was at that stage Managing Director of
Delfin. There was Kevin Lynch, a lawyer. A third Delfin member was Danny
Murphy. On the Government side originally there were Keith Lewis, Ian Cox,
community welfare man and the senior engineer for the Housing Trust.

So it was a Board that was able to operate not as representatives of a party but ---

No that’s right, and as I say I think anyone sitting in on those meetings without
knowing anything about the background of the person would have found it difficult to
identify which were the Government people and which were the private enterprise
people. It was that sort of spirit.
Ken TAEUBER

There has been an argument from some that Golden Grove was too successful and all the monied and settled people, or a lot of the settled people out at Elizabeth, up and went to the hill, which left out the socially disadvantaged.

Well, we set out to get a mix of housing and in fact the original indenture arrangements provided for a percentage of public housing. It also provided that it should be integrated into the development in such a way that it couldn’t be separately identified, so there was no question of stigma attaching to people who occupied public housing in that area. We set out to achieve that.

So there was a proportion of land for Housing Trust housing scattered

Yes, and indeed that proportion was beyond the ability of the Housing Trust to meet on some occasions because of the diminution in investment of public housing programs but we did our best to achieve it. Particularly on the side of assimilating both the housing in a way that wasn’t readily identifiable. Also, before the development started, we had consultancy from David Yencken, who was Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Melbourne. The main theme of his advice was that we should develop a village type identity so that throughout Golden Grove you have the town centre but you have also community centres that include shopping and social services and so on spread throughout. It has been so successful of course that I think the values have risen out there to the point where some people who deserve to be accommodated there can no longer afford to be. Particularly in those high areas overlooking Salisbury and so on. Its magnificent land up there.

But it has been used as an example of what can be done?

Oh yes, it became a model. There was almost a constant stream of people from interstate and overseas coming to see how it was done.

Before public/private partnerships were invented

Well that’s right, they had a public meeting that was held to wind up the project. We had the Premier Mike Rann there as a guest of course and I had to say a few words. I pointed out to him that this was a prime example of public/private partnerships that worked.